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WARD 2

Jan 22, 2016

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Beat Back Buf-felgrass	2
Stuff the Bus	3
Arizona Fisher House	3
Parks Programs	4
What to drop off	5

PAUL'S NOTE

One of the things that can be frustrating about dealing with our budget is that there is a rather sizeable chunk of it that we as a city have no control over.

That would be the Public Safety Personnel Retirement System, or PSPRS. This fiscal year, the city's contribution amounted to \$54.4 million, an increase of \$7.7 from the previous year. Despite our substantial contribution, the governing of the fund (including the amount we have to pay) is up to the State of Arizona.

There are some changes that have been proposed at the state level, and they

come out of negotiations between state legislators and leaders of public safety unions. We were briefed on some of the proposals, but we don't yet have all the details or the exact savings they will mean for the city and its taxpayers.

The changes include a decrease in the benefit increase. The change would tie benefit increases to the regional consumer price index, with a maximum of 2% (this would mean increases would be no more than half the current increase of 4%). This would bring it more in line with the return that the PSPRS fund brings in from investments.

Other changes would be bringing the city's contribution to the pension program in-line with other state retirees, a cap of \$110,000 for "pensionable" salary and a minimum of 20 years of service to be eligible. All of these would only apply to new hires.

The final bill has not been drawn up, so I don't have enough details to tell you what this will save Tucson. Some of these changes will need to be taken to the voters, since the pension system is in our state constitution.

It would be a welcome surprise if these changes had a

PAUL'S NOTE, CONTINUED

positive effect on city budgets since so much of what comes out of the legislature seems to be more ways to use money from cities to solve their own budget issues.

The PSPRS presentation wasn't part of the detailed budget discussion that the City Manager gave us earlier in the day. Among the things we discussed was the recent vote to move operations like code enforcement and graffiti abatement into environmental services. This move takes \$4 million of expenses out of the general fund and allows some more flexibility in how those operations are funded. The city manager has also made moves to consolidate departments.

We are not out of our budget hole yet, but people who think we are on the verge of being Detroit (or Baltimore or whichever city is being picked on this week) are sadly mistaken. We have made moves over the last few years to become more efficient.

For example, the city's workforce in 2008 was 6033, it is projected to be 4782 in the current budget. That's a cut of more than one fifth. This trend looks to continue. 40 probationary employees have been laid off and retirement incentives are being offered to others.

The manager is taking things seriously even within his own department. Two retiring assistant city managers are not being replaced.

The manager stated two goals, operational balance by 2018 and structural balance by 2020. I believe we are well on our way there.

BEAT BACK BUFFELGRASS

Saturday, January 23rd is Beat Back Buffelgrass Day. There are 22 sites located throughout Southern Arizona, check our website to find a site near you: www.buffelgrass.org

Join your neighbors to remove buffelgrass from our parks and public lands!

Buffelgrass is a growing problem. This invasive grass is not only an eyesore, it is a wildfire waiting to happen. Buffelgrass threatens not only our beautiful natural areas but our homes and businesses as well.

Working together we can Beat Back Buffelgrass!

Volunteer at: www.buffelgrass.org

SHADE TREES

To kick off the new year, during January and February 2016 the Trees for Tucson program is offering Tucson Electric Power customers cool shade delivered to your home at a special price of three trees for \$15! New participants are welcome, and residents who have received low-cost trees in past years are also eligible to participate again in the new year.

In the Tucson area, trees can be planted throughout the year, including during winter months as these trees are frost-tolerant. Cool temperatures and moist soil due to the wetter than usual El Niño weather patterns make planting easier than ever and conditions optimal for establishing new trees.

Trees for Tucson is also offering a wider selection than ever before of native and desert-adapted trees including the popular Desert Willow, Mesquite, Palo Verde and Pistache, other unique choices such as Catclaw Acacia, Fan-Tex Ash, and Palo Brea, and evergreen varieties such as Texas Ebony and Ironwood.

This program is sponsored by Tucson Electric Power to shade buildings and reduce summer cooling costs. To qualify for this special pricing on home shade trees, residents must be in the Tucson Electric Power service area and agree to plant the trees within 15 feet of the west, south or east side of the home.

Trees may be ordered online at www.treesfortucson.org or call (520) 837-6835 to receive a mailed or faxed form. Trees are delivered within a few weeks of ordering, and will be at least 3-5 feet tall. Instructions for tree planting and care are provided at the time of delivery. Be sure to order your trees soon! This special offer ends February 28, 2016.

ARIZONA FISHER HOUSE

Thanks to the donations of Tucsonans, the Arizona Fisher House will be dedicated on February 18 at 11 am. The public is invited.

The Arizona Fisher House located on the campus of the Tucson VA Medical Center provides a "home away from home" for loved ones of Veterans or Active Duty personnel receiving inpatient care from the Tucson VA.

The Arizona Fisher House consists of one full time manager, one assistant, and two housekeepers all employed by the VA. The Arizona Fisher House relies on community donations and volunteer support to maintain the home. The home features 16 private suites, each with its own bed and bathroom with a shower. Other amenities include a common kitchen, laundry facilities, spacious dining room and living room with a library.

For more information, call 629-1822

SENIOR OLYMPICS

Tucson Parks and Recreation presents the 32nd Annual Senior Olympic Festival. This festival is a celebration to promote fitness, health, and an active lifestyle among adults 50 years of age and older. Events include volleyball, bowling, bridge, racquetball, basketball shoot, pickleball, archery, golf, tennis, horseshoes, badminton, and so much more.

The 32nd Annual Senior Olympic Festival will feature nearly 100 events and activities at more than 20 venues throughout the City of Tucson from Jan. 9 to 31, 2016

PARKS PROGRAMS

Carol West Senior Center: Seniors will have a field trip opportunity to the Pima Air and Space Museum on Thursday, January 14th. Departure from the center is 9:30 a.m. and return is 2 p.m. The cost is \$10 per person. Sign up at the senior addition front desk.

The Carol West Senior Addition will host a "BINGO BASH" event on Thursday, January 21 from 1:30 p.m.-3:00 p.m. The cost is \$2.00 per person. The Brookdale sponsored event will include an afternoon of Bingo with great prizes, refreshments and fun! Space is limited.

Contact the Carol West Senior Addition for questions, 791-4121

Summer 2016 Activity Guide: Watch for the Summer Tucson Parks and Recreation 2016 Activity Guide which will be published on Monday, April 18, 2016. The Activity Guide will have complete information on classes, programs, aquatics, and registration. The guide can also be viewed at www.ezeereg.com.

Contact Registration Services at 791-4877 for more information or questions.

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Remember to like
Paul on Facebook!

Please bring these items to the Ward 2 Office
for the following charities:

**THE COMMUNITY FOOD BANK—Non Perishable
Items**

**DIAPER BANK OF SOUTHERN ARIZONA—
Infant/Child/Adult Diapers**

**TIHAN - Personal Care Items for Individuals
and Families in Need**

LIONS CLUB—Eye Glasses

**DANCING IN THE STREETS ARIZONA—Ballet/
Dance Equipment**

CASA MARIA—Plastic bags

MAYOR AND COUNCIL

The next Mayor and Council meeting will be on **Tuesday, February 9** Regular Session starts at 5:30 pm following an afternoon study session.

There is always a short call to the audience before the business portion of the meeting. Council chambers are located downtown at 255 W Alameda.

The agendas for the meetings are posted online at <http://cms3.tucsonaz.gov/clerks/mcdocs>

